BEGINNER

BLUES GURU POPA CHUBBY

Branching Out of the Blues

Blues doesn't always have to be based strictly on Chicago or Delta sounds. I once had three days off at a hotel in the South of France, and I found myself hooked on a catchy samba groove that was inspired by the festive setting around me. I immediately recorded a sketch—I always travel with a little recorder to capture ideas before they drift away on me—and when it came time to track my new album, Peace Love and Respect [Blind Pig], the little Brazilian-flavored riff evolved into the full-blown blues instrumental called "See You in Sete."

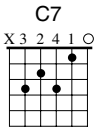
It all started with the simple C7 chord in Ex. 1. The song's main groove is shown in Ex. 2. It has kind of a "boom chicka boom chicka" single-note feel based on that C7 chord, using alternating up/down picking. The idea is to have your picking wrist in constant sixteenth-note motion, where, in the one-ee-and-a feel, one and and are downstrokes, and ee and a are upstrokes. (It should be fairly intuitive, but pickstrokes are written between the staves if you need 'em.)

The tune's main lead guitar riff is this double-stop thing [Ex. 3] that does have obvious roots in the Chicago blues tradition, but over the underlying samba groove, sounds a lot brighter. I tracked it using this raunchy, warm-sounding '65 Fender Bassman driving a closed-back cabinet loaded with two 15" Jensens.

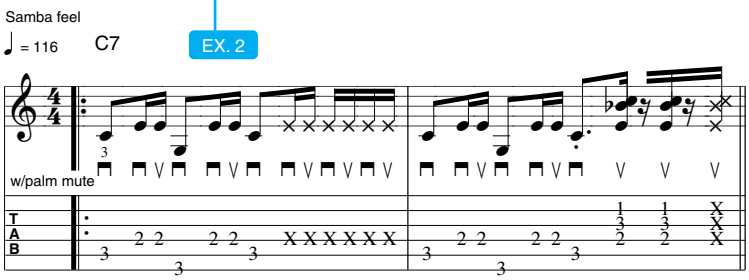
I like to use a ton of vibrato. That's the B.B. King influence. I've always loved his vibrato—that's what makes B.B. talk. His bends are very interesting, because many of them are actually microtonal. He doesn't just play straight bends, he finds all these "between the frets" notes—which is really cool when you think about the blues going back to African music and Middle Eastern music, where microtonal elements are the norm. Microtonal bends allow you to be so much more expressive than you can be with just a plain old 12-tone scale.

One thing I find many musicians lack is the ability to play with dynamics. Dynamics are such an important part of music, because being able play loud and soft gives you a vast array of colors. And so many players—especially younger guys who are coming up and just want crank their Marshall and blare—forget that if you turn it down, you can get so much happening. With my band, we know when we take it down and get soft, that's often when people really start to listen. It's like when you're speaking in front of a large crowd of people: If you yell at them, you won't get their attention. If you speak softly, they'll listen to what you're saying. —As told to Jude Gold

EX. 1



EX. 2



EX. 3

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